Brazil's Chief Justice: We Are Saving Democracy.

The chief justice of Brazil's Supreme Court, Luís Roberto Barroso, defended the court in the face of growing debate over its aggressive role in politics.

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Reporting from Brasília

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It has put presidents in prison. It has taken on Elon Musk — and won. It has become one of the world's toughest policemen of the internet. And it appears poised to make Jair Bolsonaro the next former Brazilian president in handcuffs.

Brazil's Supreme Court has become perhaps the most powerful institution in Brazil — and one of the most powerful top courts in the world — in part because it has granted itself that power.

For years, the court has overseen sprawling criminal investigations into Mr. Bolsonaro and his supporters. As a result, many on Brazil's left believe the court helped save the nation's democracy in the face of an attempted coup, while those on the right believe it is now the court itself that poses a democratic threat.

The New York Times examined the court's expanding power in an article published Wednesday. The court's chief justice, Luís Roberto Barroso, 66, is a former state prosecutor who has studied at Harvard and Yale University. In an interview, he defended the court's actions and argued that they could be a model for fighting a global far-right movement.

This interview has been edited for clarity.

Why has Brazil's Supreme Court taken a much more proactive stance than many top courts around the world?

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